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necting the various branches of the Quorra, the Old Calabar is an independent river, having its source far away to the N.E., and which, having drained the S.E. side of the elevated range of the Kong Mountains, which I have named after his late Majesty, empties itself in the neighbourhood of the Quorra, forming with it a common Delta. Nor is this proximity of the embouchures singular with respect to large rivers, since we find it to be the case with the Ganges and Burrampooter : and at the very spot in question, besides the Old Calabar and the numerous mouths of the Quorra, the Rio del Rey and Camaroons, large and distinct rivers, both fall into the Bight of Biafra.

XVII.—*On the Island of Old Providence, by Mr. C. F. COLLETT, R.N.* Communicated by Captain BEAUFORT, Royal Navy, F.R.S., Corr. Inst. France. Read 22nd May, 1837.

DURING the progress of the survey of the Eastern Coast of Central America, and of the Islands and Cays adjacent, under the direction of Captain Richard Owen, in his Majesty's ship Thunder, in 1835, we visited the Island of Old Providence.

This small island, of which no late authentic description has appeared, claims attention from the notoriety of its having been the resort of both former buccaneers and more modern privateers, as well as from the fertility of its soil, which requires little cultivation to produce a sufficiency for the inhabitants. Situated about 125 miles from the nearest part of the Mosquito Coast, and 38 miles only from the edge of the Mosquito Bank, it can be seen at a distance of from eleven to twelve leagues, and is easily distinguished from the neighbouring island of St. Andrews by the curious outline of its abrupt and peaked mountains. St. Andrews (from which it may be seen in clear weather) bears from it S. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W. 47 miles.

The positions of the island and cays, as determined by the recent survey, are as follows :—

	Lat. North.	Long. West of Greenwich.
Low Cay at the N.W. extremity of the } Coral reef }	13° 31' 36"	81° 20' 30"
Basalt Cay 45 feet high	13° 24' 0"	81° 22' 10"
North end of Catalina	13° 23' 40"	81° 22' 10"
Isabel	13° 22' 54"	81° 22' 0"
Highest peak, near the centre	13° 21' 0"	81° 21' 50"
South point	13° 19' 15"	18° 23' 10"

Var. compass 6° 45' easterly, May 1835.

Separated from its northern end, by a cut or channel of from forty to sixty yards wide, is the island of Santa Catalina, 1800 yards long, by 1300 in its greatest breadth, forming the northern boundary of a harbour thence named, affording secure anchorage in from two to three and a half fathoms. Both these islands are very hilly, and on approaching them, present a delightful variety of beautiful scenery. On the authority of one of the oldest inhabitants, the channel between the islands is said to have had eight or nine feet water; at present, however, it has, at its eastern entrance, only two feet. This change of depth may be accounted for by the drift of sand and stones from off the reefs, whence there is almost a constant set into the cut, owing to the prevalence of N.E. and E.N.E. winds.

In tracing the history of these islands, which may be found on reference to Ringrose's Translation of the Lives of the Buccaneers, published in 1684, the larger may be identified as St. Catharine, of which much mention is therein made. From whom, or when, it received its present name of Old Providence it is not easy to say.

Old Providence is nearly four miles and a quarter long, and two and a half in its greatest breadth, of an irregular oval shape. The highest ground, which can hardly be called a point, near the centre of the island, rises to 1190 feet above the level of the sea; from this other hills, mostly wooded to their summits, diverge towards the shore, and terminate boldly. The island is surrounded by an extensive bank of coral and coarse sand, stretching to the northward for ten miles and a half: a reef, in many parts dry, extends in a northerly direction, at a distance of three-quarters of a mile along the eastern side, till within about three miles of the north-east angle of the bank, whence it trends west across the bank for two miles and a half, having at its western extremity a small cay, about two or three feet high, composed of coral sand and stones, brought there by fishermen from the islands. On this northern part of the reef, and three-quarters of a mile to the eastward of the cay, His Majesty's schooner Jackdaw was wrecked on the morning of the 11th of March, 1835. This unfortunate occurrence was occasioned by the inaccuracies of the Spanish plan of the island with which she was supplied, and the best then published, which only made the reef to extend four miles and a half from the land instead of ten miles, added to a strong south-west current.

Since this time a very accurate chart of the islands and cays adjacent has been completed on the scale of four inches to a mile, which represents all the features of this extensive bank and coral reef very minutely*.

* The wreck of the Jackdaw was complete, and the lives of the crew were only saved by the presence of mind and decision of Lieutenant Barnett, her commander, who, seeing at once the impossibility of avoiding the reef, ran his vessel directly on

This reef binding the eastern shore of the island extends to, and terminates at, a distance of a mile and a quarter from its southern point, whence the soundings extend in a southern direction from two miles and a quarter to three miles. The sea almost constantly breaks on the reef, so that it can be discovered long before the bank is approached; and although the openings in the reef have a depth of from three to five fathoms water, a passage is seldom attempted, except in small vessels. The coral rocky heads within (*i. e.* to the westward of the reef) are very numerous and dangerous, and some small wooded cays are situated to the northward of the islands.

Old Providence should always, if possible, be approached from the northward and by day, in consequence of the prevalence of the N.E. winds, making it in the parallel of $13^{\circ} 32'$ or $33'$; soundings will be first got on the bank in from 15 to 17 fathoms, coarse coral sand; then steer W. by N. $\frac{1}{2}$ N. by compass, keeping along to the northward of the reef at about three-quarters of a mile distance, till the highest peak on the island bears S. 3° E.; then shape a course towards it, rounding the western elbow of the reef, at one and a half or two cables' distance, when, after a run of about three-quarters of a mile, good anchorage may be obtained in five, eight, or ten fathoms, with the Low Cay bearing N.N.E. If, however, intending to proceed to the anchorage off Santa Catalina, on rounding the reef, steer S. by W. $\frac{1}{2}$ W., nearly six miles, until Morgan's Head transits the highest peak in the island; then haul up S.E. by S., and stand on till Basalt Cay bears E., Morgan's Head S.E. $\frac{3}{4}$ S., and anchor immediately on obtaining soundings in five or six fathoms. For a vessel coming from the southward and by night, the most advisable plan would be, on making the land, to lie-to till day-light, keeping it in sight; when, in the morning, the beat up to the anchorage would not be above six or seven miles, with a certainty of a good breeze and smooth water. In working up the clearness of the water enables the eye to detect the shallow rocky heads, which abound within three cables' length of the whole edge of the bank.

No dependence can be placed on the currents, as they vary in strength and direction *off* the bank, while determining the outer eastern part of which an almost invariable set to N.W. was experienced.

The tides are variable, sometimes, in north-westerly breezes, rising as much as two feet; but no greater rise or fall than six or seven inches was observed during the six weeks (part of April and May) that the boats and the ship were employed surveying the island.

the most favourable spot for enabling him to construct the rafts, by which, with the assistance of a sloop, his crew and provisions were landed with safety.—Ed.

The only harbour is that of Catalina, before mentioned, to enter which a pilot is almost indispensable. The anchoring ground is good, and although open to the winds from N.W. to S.W., the reefs in that direction form a barrier to the setting in of a heavy sea.

Morgan's Head (named after the noted buccaneer) is a very remarkable rock, nearly detached from the S.W. point of Catalina Island. It rises forty feet from the level of the sea, and from its proximity to the rocks of the island is not easily distinguished till closely approached. On entering the harbour it will be found to bear a striking resemblance to the figure of a man's head, and gradually develops the profile of an elderly-looking ruffian.

Split Hill, near the northern end of the island, is 550 feet in height, and has the extraordinary appearance of a hill having been, by some sudden convulsion of nature, rent in twain as far as one-third down from its summit. It is peaked on either side of the chasm, which is about sixty feet wide and eighty feet deep.

The geological structure of this island would seem to be chiefly limestone, containing numerous small but deep caves near the water's edge, which being filled alternately with air and water, cause a strange spouting, accompanied by a loud roaring. The rocks generally are precipitous. I am not aware that basalt has been found on the island, unless the fine black sand on the western side, which is attracted by the magnet, be the remains of decomposed basalt. But at Basalt Cay, about 400 yards to the northward of Catalina, the basaltic columns rise to forty-five feet above the sea, and stand about fifteen degrees from the perpendicular, inclining to the southward. The coral formations appear to resemble those in other parts of the West Indies.

The watering place for ships is situated on the western shore, at two miles and a quarter from the anchorage in the harbour; it can be easily recognised by being a little to the southward of some white cliffs. It is the largest of four streams, issuing from one spring, situated in the highest part of the island. The filling place, whence excellent water of a chalybeate quality was procured, is about 100 fathoms from the mouth of the stream, and partially hid by a sandy beach, through which it forces itself after heavy rains. No spring of water is to be found on the small island of Catalina.

Wood, for fuel, can be procured on the western part of Catalina, where there is no cultivation, from its being very hilly. The mountain grape and goatwoods are the best. No trees, large enough for spars for ships, grow on either island. The calabash and mangrove furnish good knees for boats; the latter grows in swampy ground and near the beach. Cedar is good, equal to

that of Cape Gracias á Dios, and squares from twenty to twenty-four inches. Iron-wood is found on the N.E. hill of Old Providence. Manchineel, or manzanilla, is found in abundance. A very curious shrub, of from twelve to fifteen feet in height, called by the inhabitants the cockspur, is found in great quantities all over the island. It receives its name from the resemblance of the pods, which cluster the bush, to the shape of a cock's spur. The pods when ripe are occupied by numerous small black ants, whose bite is so severe as to be said to have caused death in two or three instances. This shrub is not found on any other island in these seas, and no account of its having been imported exists.

Good stock is plentiful; in fact the soil is exceedingly productive, and nature here appears in abundant luxuriance, affording to the animal creation the greatest profusion, with very little cultivation. Fruits of various kinds, such as sapodillas, mangoes, oranges, tamarinds, plums, limes, &c., are plentiful. Wild pigeons, guanias, and hiccatee or land-turtle, abound; the latter are found in the mountains, and form a delicious article of food. Yams may be had at six shillings the cwt.; likewise cocos, plantains, and pumpkins. The cattle are generally in good order; bullocks of 4 cwt. or 5 cwt. sell at from 3*l.* to 4*l.* sterling a-head; pork 4½*d.* a pound. Fowls in abundance at 12*s.* a dozen. Turkeys from 4*s.* to 6*s.* a piece. Horses are a fine breed, rather small, and purchased at from 3*l.* to 4*l.* sterling a-head. There are a few asses on the island. Fish, peculiar to these latitudes, abound in profusion on the banks: sharks are very numerous.

Cotton is the staple export, and is cultivated more or less by every one. This, with turtle-shell and a few hides, are the principal articles of trade. About 30,000*lbs.* of cotton and 170*lbs.* of shell are annually taken away by the traders in exchange for English calicoes, cloths, &c., brought from Jamaica. The exorbitant prices of these cause the island purchasers to incur a debt which the next year's produce serves to liquidate. This system of keeping the inhabitants a season a-head in debt, is the trader's interest to adopt. Cotton is planted in June, and gathered from December to May. Sugar-cane and coffee are grown, but only in sufficient quantities for their own consumption. The berry of the latter is of a superior quality, but is so long in arriving at perfection, besides requiring great labour in its cultivation, that it is seldom or never exported.

In the beginning of 1835 the population, by the last census, was 342 persons*, about one-half of whom were slaves. The

* This is rather at variance with the account of this island given in the "Dictionnaire Géographique Universel," published at Paris in 1831, in which it is stated that this island "is not inhabited."

younger part of the community employ themselves turtling: they divide six months of the year into two seasons, of which March, April, and May is called the 'running,' and June, July, and August the 'crawling' season. They have three vessels of from ten to fifteen tons burthen, employed thus, which, from their size, are managed very easily among the banks they frequent—such as the Serrana, Serranilla, Roncador, &c. The inhabitants are generally hospitable, but have neither form or observance of religious duties. Marriages are contracted by civil ceremony and bargain; and their only recognition of a supreme power is in the respect they pay to Sunday, which is marked by a total cessation of labour, and attention to external appearance. To speak of the moral character of these people would perhaps be hazardous; they have few temptations to drunkenness, restrictions being placed on the introduction of spirituous liquors. Thefts and other crimes are dealt with severely.

It is to be regretted, that though in a remote corner of the western hemisphere, there should be so many persons without the advantages, or means of Christian instruction; and it is rather a matter of surprise that missionaries,* either of the Protestant or Roman Catholic Church, have not found their way to a place so well calculated, in every respect, to ensure success to their labours.

The island is under the government of the republic of New Granada, but more immediately so under that of St. Andrews, the two islands, Old Providence and St. Andrews, forming the ninth canton of the republic. At the latter there is a governor, a few soldiers, a collector, and a civil magistrate. At Old Providence a collector and a civil magistrate reside, who administer the government with two assistants. English is the language spoken. Their flag is red, blue, yellow, vertical in equal parts, the red being nearest the mast, with a white star of five points in the blue division. Criminals are transported here and to St. Andrews, for which purpose these islands appear to have been used by the Spaniards previously to their being taken possession of by the buccaneers.

Old Providence is visited by the traders who frequent the coast from Cape Gracias á Dios to San Blas. No regular trading was commenced until the arrival of an adventurer named Aurey, in 1817-18, when the South American colonies, separating from the mother country, presented an opening for privateering. This Aurey having obtained a commission from Buenos Ayres as an independent chief, was followed by several others to

* Being under the Government of Columbia it is believed that none but Roman Catholic teachers would be tolerated.

this island, who paid him for commissions, and 18 per cent. on all captures. Being bold and energetic, he established a government and repaired the principal fort, which thenceforward took his name. His vessels, commanded by adventurers like himself, annoyed the Spanish trade very successfully. They stormed and took several places along the coast, among the rest Truxillo, which they plundered, and brought the spoil to this island. In consequence many traders resorted hither, and the island was then more populous than it has since been. The principal trader at present is a Mr. Shepherd, of San Juan de Nicaragua, who has several sloops and schooners.

The only town—so called by the islanders, and named Isabel by General Aurey, after one in the Gulf of Dolce, stands at the northern end of the island, at the head of Catalina harbour, close to the channel between the two islands. Not more than eight or nine houses or huts now remain of what was once a populous and flourishing place. Several houses and plantations are scattered over the island, accessible only by a sort of road which passes round the island. No one resides on Catalina; all the ground there capable of cultivation is laid out in plantations of corn, cotton, &c. One of the oldest inhabitants is M'Kellar, the pilot, who boasts of being a Scotchman, and was in the habit of amusing us with many interesting anecdotes of the exploits of General Aurey and his followers, in which he generally figured as a principal character.

During a short war with Spain in 1625-6, the Spanish Guarda Costas were constantly employed in aggressions upon the trade of the English and French, and by their own severity gave room for the system of buccaneering, at first adopted in self-defence and retaliation, and subsequently persevered in from habit and a love of plunder. If time did not permit the buccaneers to lavish their booty away in their usual debaucheries, they used to hide it in the desert cays which they frequented, and where much valuable treasure is still supposed to be concealed.

In 1664, when the Spaniards were in quiet possession of the island, Mansvelt, celebrated alike for his daring and crimes, took it by storm, considering it well adapted for the head-quarters of the lawless band of which he was the leader. At his death Morgan assumed the command, and viewing the island in the same light as Mansvelt, took possession of it in December, 1670. At this time the small island of Santa Catalina was well fortified, having no less than nine batteries on it, mounting in all forty-nine guns. Remaining some time here, his followers continued their depredations upon the Spaniards, always bringing the spoil here. Before Morgan left it, he threw the guns of the forts into the

sea and set fire to the houses and forts, preserving one of the latter only from complete destruction. Remains of three batteries can still be traced. Morgan was knighted in 1675; in 1677 he was appointed deputy-governor of Jamaica, with a salary of 600*l*. In the ensuing reign of James II. he was recalled to England on account of his not only conniving at, but assisting in, the depredations committed by the English buccaneers on the fleets and subjects of Spain.

Little mention is made of the island till 1795, when a few families from Blewfields, on the Mosquito Coast, settled by permission of the Spaniards. From this till 1817 it remained quite tranquil, when General Aurey took the command as before stated. At his death, in 1821-2, which was occasioned by a fall from his horse, the privateers dispersed, and the island resumed its present quiet state under the republic of Granada.

On reading Miss Jane Porter's interesting narrative of Sir Edward Seaward's shipwreck, little doubt can be entertained but that the islands to which she alludes are the same that have been described, for there exist no two islands so large and closely situated as Old Providence and Santa Catalina along the whole line of the Mosquito Coast. In her preface to that work, p. ix., she states:—'The islands which form so large an object of interest in this work may be found in old charts in the neighbourhood of the Serranillas, but until Sir Edward Seaward, on being cast ashore there, discovered them to be habitable, they had been marked down as a cluster of barren rocks only, whose dangerous reefs warned ships to avoid them.' Had she favoured her readers with a copy of the chart to which she occasionally alludes as having been constructed under the direction of Sir Edward, a more certain conviction as to the identity of the islands on which she has founded her work would have been obtained: as it is, we are only left to conclude from her accuracy in delineating their situation, resources, productions, and proximity to the Serranilla Cays, (which are only a composition of sand and stone, not more than six feet in height,) that the islands of Catalina and Old Providence were the scene of the events she has so admirably narrated.
